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ABSTRACT

Parents and teachers share concerns about appropriate early childhood educational practices, but often differ on what methods best serve the children. Differences in opinion can result in strained relationships between the home and school, and make fulfilling the basic educational needs of the child more difficult. This study explores the age-old debate of what makes a good kindergarten program by examining teachers' and parents' perceptions and expectations of kindergarten programs. Subjects, 148 parents and 45 teachers in 2 private day care centers and 14 public schools located in a predominantly African American and low-income community on Chicago's south side, completed questionnaires. The results indicated that both groups agreed that cognitive development and academic skills are of primary importance. The results also indicated that parents placed greater value on direct instruction, while teachers placed greater value on the use of a variety of materials for learning. The study stressed the need for teachers to educate parents about various teaching methods and strategies that support learning in order to successfully involve parents in the education process. (Contains 27 references and 4 appendices containing the cover letters and questionnaires are attached.) (SM)

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ED 383 403

PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF KINDERGARTEN IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

By

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A field research report
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This paper explores the question of what makes a good kindergarten. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' and parents' perceptions and expectations of kindergarten programs. Sixteen schools from the lower socio-economic African-American community were sent self-reporting questionnaires which were designed to elicit information on the broad goals of parents and teachers along with preferences for specific instructional methods. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data from the 45 teachers and 148 parents responding. The findings of this study indicate that there is not a significant difference between parents' and teachers' perceptions regarding broad educational goals however, there are statistically significant differences in preferences for specific instructional methods.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Educators agree that the early childhood curriculum should be based on sound theoretical principles of how children learn and develop -- that to be effective, the curriculm should derive from the needs and interests of individual children. However, despite professional concensus on this issue, programs in early childhood education frequently ignore the essential differences between formal education and early childhood education (Kagan, 1992; Hatch & Freeman, 1988).

Parents and teachers share concerns about appropriate practices, but there is often a disparity of opinion regarding what methodologies best serve the children. While mandates have replaced developmental goals with academic goals, the controversy is further complicated by prescribed curricula that do not reflect the educational research on what constitutes sound educational practice. In effect, mandates often require teachers to do things against their better judgment (Hatch & Freeman, 1988). Testing mandates further intensify parents' fears that their six-year-olds will not be ready for first grade and may experience serious trouble in school.

The question of what makes a good kindergarten program has been an area of debate for over a century. The diverse opinions about the goals and functions of kindergarten occur within the teaching profession and between educators and parents.

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions among kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children regarding the role of kindergarten in the educational process.

Rationale

A significant factor to be considered when devising programs for young children is the negotiation process involved in decisions about the curriculum. In a position statement on appropriate curriculum content for young children, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) cite various sources for curriculum development. Educators are expected to take into account child development theories, a child's individual characteristics, and a knowledge base of various disciplines including the knowledge children need to function in our society, different cultural values, and differing parental values and desires (1990). Clearly this model of early childhood education requires intimate collaboration between a variety of sources.

The two most powerful stakeholders in the curriculum development process are teachers and parents. Studies show that when the relationship is strained between the home and school, fulfilling the basic educational needs of the child is more difficult. When support and understanding among these

groups is strained, the child suffers (VanCleaf, 1979). Given the importance of understanding each group's values and assumptions in the development of effective early childhood programs, it is essential that open communication be fostered. When positive parent-teacher relationships emerge, it enables the variety of resources necessary for creating developmentally appropriate programs to flourish through collaboration.

The values and priorities of parents and teachers are the basis for perceptions on the role of schools and goals of schooling. Perceptions of appropriate practice stem from personal experience, cultural background, values, attitudes and beliefs (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; O'Brien, 1993). In culturally diverse environments, these factors must be revealed so that developmentally appropriate practices have a foundation from which to grow. Overlooking the values and priorities of parents and teachers regarding the role of kindergarten has created a gap between understanding what is best and providing what is best in early childhood programs.

Examining the similarities and differences between educators' and parents' perceptions on the goals of schooling is the first step in building an environment that provides continuity between home and school for young children entering kindergarten. Developing a mutually supportive atmosphere can only occur when open communication has established clarity between parents and teachers regarding their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations (Van Cleaf, 1979).

Goodlad (1979) describes the goals of schooling that have emerged as a result of the collaboration between socio-political forces and professional educators by placing them into four categories: academic, vocational, social and civic, and personal. To create strong interconnections between the family and school there must be an examination of the compatibility of goals.

Overview of the Study

This study examined teachers' and parents' perceptions and expectations of kindergarten programs. It compared differences in perceptions held by kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten students regarding the goals of kindergarten. It is hoped that as a result of this study, the educators and parents involved in this research will have a clearer understanding of the similarities and differences they have in their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations regarding kindergarten.

Definition of Terms

In this study the term teacher refers to school employees responsible for implementing the educational curriculum. The term goals refers to what schools are asked and/or expected to achieve (Goodlad, 1979). Kindergarten refers to a classroom

division below first grade containing children between the ages of four to six. Academics refers to a highly structured, narrow emphasis, usually on reading and math, with many paper and pencil activities. This is usually teacher directed and based on skill acquisition.

Limitations

The sample of this study was limited to African-American parents and teachers who live within a large metropolitian area. This descriptive study used self-reporting questionnaires which are limited by the individual's ability to understand and interpret the questions and terms. Since the majority of respondents sent their children to public schools, generaliztions to those African-Americans who send their children to private schools may not be applicable. The response rate for parents and teachers within the private sector was not large enough to do a second, more focused analysis on just this subgroup or to make comparisons between the public and private school sector.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Conflicting perceptions about the appropriate role of kindergarten are evident in the literature. Educators are grappling with definitions of readiness, the downward shift of academic expectations, mandatory programming, and a lack of professional consensus on the role of kindergarten. Parents, as well, struggle to help their children "get ahead," "keep up," or "make it." They are inundated with media ideas about education, child behavior, and how to help make their child's life good, better, or even the best. These issues make straightforward communication about the role of kindergarten difficult, but essential. Parents' and teachers' expectations, perceptions, and views of kindergarten must be openly explored and addressed so that young children are not caught in the crossfire of miscommunication and conflict.

This review of the literature will explore some of these issues. First, it will provide a historical perspective on the role of kindergarten. Then it will provide cross-cultual perspectives and outline current philosophies and practices. Finally, it will explore parents' and teachers' perceptions of the role of kindergarten.

Historical Perspectives on the Role of Kindergarten

The historical struggle to define the role of kindergarten can be traced back to the late 1800s. The Froebelian conservatives and the Deweyian progressives engaged in bitter debates. Froebel's student, Mrs. Schurz began the first American kindergarten in 1855. The principles that provided the foundation for her curriculum were based on Froebel's philosophy that the child's internal interests and motivations were the springboard for education. Tempered guidance from the teacher was initiated only when helping the children understand their environment. Froebel's curriculum contained carefully sequenced activities, instruction through play, and the child's naturally evolving interests (Frost & Kissinger, 1976).

Dewey's developmental philosophic approach to the education of young children also emphasized the importance of active learning, while recognizing the potential of environmental interactions to shape growth. Dewey's educational theories grew out of the philosophies of Rousseau (discovering the human nature), Pestalozzi (the originator of readiness), and out of his reaction to traditional models of education, particularly rote memorization and student passivity. Darwin's theory of biological evolution strengthened Dewey's belief that education should center on the individual's adaptation to life. Dewey's influence has been far reaching and has provided a theoretical

foundation for early childhood programs. Many of his views evolved into new forms as educators responded to changing social conditions. His emphasis on thoughtful planning in the curriculum later evolved into instructional goals and objectives. His belief in developmental readiness laid the ground work for the theories of normative maturation as postulated by Gesell and his followers (Frost & Kissinger, 1976).

Current Philosophies and Practices

Educational philosophy has always been influenced by social and political conditions of the day (Frost & Kissinger, 1976; Goodlad, 1979). The goals of schooling are derived from social and political forces. Goodlad (1979) places the goals emerging from collaboration between these socio-political forces and professional educators into four categories: academic, vocational, social and civic, and personal. State mandates and expectations are based on the general agreement of about a dozen educational goals. While these goals reflect the needs and interests of society, Goodlad observes that "goals articulated by the state are substituted for personal growth, and the quality of educational programs is then judged according to levels of goal attainment" (p. 38).

In a 1987 study of major trends in kindergartens, a momentum toward all-day, mandatory programs was revealed. Local funding

and local control were noted as other trends impacting kindergarten programs (Robinson, 1987). With fewer distinctions being made between kindergarten and the primary grades, there has been a move toward more skill-centered and academically oriented programming (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Frost & Kissinger, 1976; Kagan, 1992). The implications of these trends in programming has become an area of concern and debate for many early childhood educators (Charlesworth, 1985; Frost & Kissinger, 1976; Goodlad, 1979; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; O'Brien, 1993; Rescorla, 1991).

The lack of clarity over what constitutes an appropriate curriculum for kindergarten is the result of a lack of consensus regarding definitions of readiness (Kagan, 1992). These conflicting views can be divided into two groups (Charleston, 1985; Kagan, 1992). The first group conceptualizes readiness as preparing children for school, that is, first grade. These propopents embrace specific cognitive skills and tend to favor direct instructional models (Hatch & Freeman, 1988). This concept has dominated American education (Charleston, 1985). In contrast with this view, the second group believes readiness for learning is a function of developmental psychology. It is not age specific though maturational norms usually define capacity to learn specific material (Kagan, 1992; Charleston, 1985).

When Hatch and Freeman analyzed beliefs about readiness, they classified interview responses into three groups: maturational, behavioral, and interactional. In their findings, more than half the educators worked in programs that conflicted with their beliefs about appropriate educational practices (Hatch & Freeman, 1988).

The values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions held by educators clearly affect the design and implementation of kindergarten programs (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; O'Brien, 1993; Rescorla, 1991). Educators' and parents' concerns with methods and content may be the result of theoretical ambiguities (Hatch & Freeman,1988). Goodlad (1979) reminds us, "There can be no serious discussion of what education is for, without that discussion embracing what education is. Similarly, there can be no serious consideration of what schools are for without simultaneously considering what education is" (Goodlad, 1979).

As educators grapple with philosophical issues, practical confusions have occurred. Inequity of access to kindergarten programs (Kagan, 1992), different interpretations of what constitutes developmentally appropriate practice, and discontinuity in classroom practices are signs of deep theoretical divisions (Kagan, 1992; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; O'Brien, 1993). Unless we accept the notion that high achievement scores determine the adequacy of teaching methods, the challenge of defining the qualities of what makes a good

kindergarten is not the responsibility of any one group or individual. It must be achieved through a consensus of societal values (Kagan, 1992; O'Brien, 1993; Goodlad, 1979).

Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Different cultural groups have different cultural attitudes about the characteristics that make good teachers and classroom practices (Charlesworth, 1985; Frost & Kissinger, 1976; Lee & Graham, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Delpit, 1988; O'Brien, 1993; Hatch & Freeman,1988). The current interest in providing non-biased curricula has led educators to explore a variety of perspectives. In this section, an overview of the American, Japanese and Italian perspectives on early childhood education will be addressed.

An American Perspective

In America, the debate over process versus skill orientation is often divided along cultural lines (Delpit, 1988; O'Brien, 1993). Delpit (1988) believes that many teachers of color feel estranged from the progressive educational movement which promotes a process orientation. When process advocates dismiss

teachers of color as too "skills oriented," the dialogue about how to best educate children of color has been silenced. The assumption that developmentally appropriate practices as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are universally applicable is questioned by some researchers (Delpit, 1988; O'Brien, 1993). Delpit contends that schools which reflect liberal, middle-class values and aspirations ensure the maintenance of the status quo; that is, power will remain in the hands of those who already have it (Delpit, 1988). In her article "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," Delpit (1988) describes the debate over instructional methodology (i.e., process or skill orientation). She believes the dilemma in communicating across cultures is exacerbated by different cultural communication styles. The cultural dissonance that occurs in cross-cultural interactions, leads to a "silenced dialogue." Delpit believes it is the result of different cultural perspectives and is intimately connected to the established power structure (Delpit, 1988).

A Japanese Perspective

In Japan, small class sizes are considered detrimental to children's social development (Lee & Graham, 1992). The consensus among Japanese parents, teachers, early childhood

experts, and government policymakers is that building character rather than academic readiness skills should be the central goal for preschool children (Lee & Graham, 1992). In addition, there is a belief that children can and should behave differently at school than at home. This contrasts with the value held by western educators which emphasizes continuity between home and school (Alexander, 1987; West, 1990; Rescorla, 1991; Smith & Hubbard, 1988).

An Italian Perspective

As American educators wrestle with curricular issues of what is best for children in the classroom and how to create continuity between home and school, many have turned to Italy for examples of model early childhood programs. Reggio Emilia, for example, has attracted worldwide attention since 1979 because of its emphasis on environmental continuity, project-based curricular practices, and the high level of community involvement. The Reggio Emilia model illustrates how cultural and educational values can blend to form outstanding early childhood programs (West, 1990). The process of maintaining communication between parents and teachers is accepted as both difficult and complicated. The core belief in many Italian programs is that no one party has a monopoly on decisions that affect children. This is reflected in the composition and roles

of parent-teacher boards and an average turnout rate of 85% for school board elections (West, 1990).

The Parent's Role in the Education Process

Educational ideologies on the parent's role in the educational process create a focal point for building a base of collaboration (O'Brien, 1993). Research has confirmed a significant correlation between child academic achievement and the quality of parent-teacher relationships. Observations of 3- and 4-year-olds has shown that when the nature of parent/staff communication is warm and reciprocal, children were more talkative with teachers and more socially positive with their peers (Smith & Hubbard, 1988).

To build positive relationships between the home and school, an understanding about the attitudes of parents and teachers must be reached (Van Cleaf, 1979). Stallworth's research (as cited in Smith & Hubbard, 1988) suggests that negative attitudes of teachers and principals may inhibit parental involvement in developing school policies and procedures. Stallworth found that school staff felt that supportive roles such as library, lunchroom, or homework assistants were appropriate areas for parental involvement (as cited in Smith & Hubbard, 1988). Other educators hold the view that one group's domination or denigration of the other can

have a negative impact on children and may even lead to negative behavior outcomes (Smith & Hubbard, 1988).

Datta (as cited in Van Cleaf, 1979) found that the impact on children's educational success is influenced more by the parent than the school. In light of evidence that suggests both the home and the school suffer when the relationship is strained and that their fufilling basic functions is more difficult without the support and understanding of the other, it is not surprising that researchers continue to call for further explorations into the relationship between parents and teachers (Van Cleaf, 1979).

The Head Start Model of parent involvement provides a useful paradigm for understanding how parent-teacher collaboration can support greater consensus about the content of the kindergarten. But even Head Start has been criticized for not living up to its original intent. When Head Start was launched in 1965, it was designed to foster family involvement in education by giving parents decision-making power. The focus on home-school continuity was an integral component of a program's success. The parents' determination of what types of programs and activities were most relevant to them and their children provided a framework for addressing social issues and empowering the disenfranchised (O'Brien, 1993). The program's inability to maintain parental participation and control may have stemmed from the program's design to remediate deficiencies

within the family (O' Brien, 1993). According to Bronfenbrenner, in order to have strong interconnections between family and school, there must be reciprocity, a balance of power, and affective relationships (as cited in Smith & Hubbard, 1988). Some researchers assert that Head Start not only promoted the ideology of family deficiencies but also reinforced class-based programming (O'Brien, 1993).

Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of the Kindergarten

Both teachers and parents share concerns about appropriate teaching practices though the methods preferred are not necessarily always the same (Van Cleaf, 1979). Research on parents' and teachers' views of appropriate teaching methods for kindergarten often show conflicting results. In a study of 14 elementary schools, parents of kindergarten children and teachers were surveyed on their preferences for teaching methodology. The conclusions reached in this study indicated that both parents and teachers favored cognitively oriented methods, but parents had a stronger preference for teacher-directed instruction (Van Cleaf, 1979). In contrast to the findings in Van Cleaf's research, a 1982 study by McGillieuddy-Delisi (as cited in Rescorla, 1991) revealed that parents of higher socio economic status discounted the

value of direct instruction and favored ideas of developmental readiness (Rescorla, 1991).

In assessing parent and teacher attitudes about early academic programs, Rescorla (1991) developed the Educational Attitude Scale that consists of 32 items to assess attitudes about five domains of behavior: academic, athletic, social, art, behavior compliance, and living skills. The sample Rescorla and her associates used in their 1991 study was from upper-middle class families with professional education backgrounds. The data revealed that mothers and teachers both felt that social experiences were important. However, the parents consistently valued early academic experiences more than their children's teachers. This pattern of parental expectations exceeding teacher expectations for early skill attainment is consistent with other research.

In examining philosophies and practices of kindergarten teachers, principals, and district supervisors, Hatch and Freeman (1988) conducted ethnographic interviews with 36 participants (three from each of the above categories). Their sample was drawn from 12 Ohio school districts randomly selected by population stratification. Each informant was asked questions designed to expose beliefs about how children learn and develop and what kinds of experiences should be provided. Informants were also asked to describe a typical kindergarten day. The contrast between beliefs and practices was pronounced. Based

on descriptions by the participants, all kindergartens in the study were classified as skill-centered, academic programs preparing children for first grade. Hatch and Freeman found that belief systems could be categorized into three groups: 28% were classified as maturationalists; 28% were classified as interactionists; and 44% were classified as behaviorists. This meant that 55% of the educators studied worked in programs which conflicted with their beliefs. The percentage of teachers working in programs they considered developmentally inappropriate was an even higher 67%.

Influences Upon Teacher Attitudes and Values

Teachers' values are largely a function of educational level, job role, professional socialization, cultural beliefs, personality, and self-perception. Researchers have studied these areas to see their impact on teacher philosophies and practices (Driscoll & Reynolds, 1984; O'Brien, 1993). Because the educational environments that teachers create are a product of their life orientations, so too are their interpretations and perceptions of what constitutes appropriate practice.

In a study of teachers' values and classroom culture, O'Brien examined the impact of social class on the attitudes of teachers (1993). As a participant observer in one Head Start program in a small economically depressed area of rural

Pennsylvania, O'Brien recorded the behaviors and beliefs of three Head Start teachers. The head teacher, assistant teacher, and special programs tutor were observed in five areas of program organization. O'Brien concluded that teachers' preferences for program structure and teaching methodology are largely a function of job role, cultural beliefs, and personality. She also found that regardless of philosophical preferences or background, there was a gap between belief and practice (O'Brien, 1993).

Influences Upon Parent Attitudes and Values

Parental attitudes, values, and beliefs about academic achievement and cognitive development are influenced by marital quality, parent personality, parental role, educational level, and cultural beliefs (Goldberg, 1990; Seginer, 1983). Seginer (1983) describes three antecedents of parents' educational expectations: school feedback, parents' knowledge, and their own academic aspirations. Seginer's analysis showed that parent predictions of academic success were class specific. When working class parents and black parents made predictions about academic success, they were not linked to school feedback (i.e., report cards or IQ scores) but rather to their own aspirations and perceptions of their child. This inconsistency between school and parent perception supports Delpit's contention that

working class and minority groups function outside the power structure. Delpit (1988) believes that the discrepancy between the perceptions of professional educators and the parents of working class and minority children can only be reduced when working class and minority groups are included into the domain of power as authority figures.

As the role of parents is recognized as increasingly important for positive school experiences, educators are concerned with how parents will respond to curricular innovations. In a study of a university-based child development center that was making the transition to a whole language approach nine mothers were interviewed (Bruneau, 1989). This sample of middle-and-upper middle class mothers all believed that having books available at home was important. Reading regularly to their children was a standard practice and all believed that the development of literacy began at home. The whole language approach validated the types of literacy activities that were occurring in the home already so parents generally accepted its value. Despite this evidence of continuities between home and school, parents still voiced deep concerns over lack of direct instruction in the classroom and their child's readiness for first grade (Bruneau, 1989).

Summary

This review of the literature has provided strong evidence that there is a disparity among and between educators and parents in their attitudes and perceptions of the role of kindergarten. There is strong agreement, however, that these differences in perceptions can have a detrimental effect on children. Additional research addressing these issues may help clarify the nature and extent of these differences and indicate how parents and educators can work collaboratively in pursuing mutual goals for kindergarten children.

CHAPTER III

THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to look at the similarities and differences in perceptions held by kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten students regarding the goals and preferences in teaching methodologies in kindergarten programs. It is hoped that the results of this study may help educators build greater consensus in home-school relations by seeking out the perceptions of the goals of kindergarten.

Methodology

Sample

One hundred forty-eight African-American parents whose children were attending kindergarten programs on the south side of Chicago during the 1993-1994 school year were surveyed. The parent population was taken from 2 private day care centers that provide kindergarten programs and 14 public schools. Of the schools that participated in this study, 25% of the parents sent their children to private schools and 75% of the parents sent their children to public schools. Of the children whose parents responded to the survey, 75% were mothers, 17% were fathers, and 8% were guardians. While most of the respondents (87%) finished high school, and 47% had attended college, only 13% had college degrees. Table 1 presents a summary of the background characteristics of kindergarten parents who

participated in the study.

Of the 45 teachers surveyed, 42 (91%) were employed with the Chicago Board of Education and 4 (9%) were employed in private schools. All the schools were located on the south side of Chicago in African-American communities. Of the teachers responding to the survey, 52% were African-American, 43% were Caucasian, and 5% were Hispanic. The majority of teachers (64%) had educational levels that exceeded a four year college degree with 44% having obtained a masters degree or higher. Table 2 summarizes the background characteristics of the teacher sample.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire designed for this study includes three sections (see Appendix A). The first section elicits basic demographic information from respondents. The second section was adapted from a questionnaire designed by Glogovsky (1990) based on John Goodlad's (1979) research on educational goals. In this section, parents and teachers were asked to indicate the three most important goals to include in a kindergarten program.

The final section was adapted from a survey utilized by Williams (1992) regarding common teaching practices. Parents and teachers rated how important they believed each of 18 items was in a good kindergarten program using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). Depending

Table 1

Background Characteristics of Parent Sample (N = 148)*

Background Variable	f	%
Parent completing survey		
Mother	109	75
Father	25	17
Guardian	11	8
Highest grade completed in school		
Grade School	8	6
High School	50	34
Some College (AA)	68	47
College Degree (BS,BA)	14	10
Some Graduate work	3	2
Masters Degree or beyond	2	1
First child attending kindergarten**	77	56
Preschool experience***	110	75
Racial background		
African-American	143	99
Hispanic	0	0
Asian	0	0
Caucasian	1	.1
Native American	0	0
Other	1	.1
School		
Public	112	75
Private	36	25

* actual responses ranged from 137 to 148 depending on missing data

** respondents who indicate yes

*** respondents who indicated their child had previously attended preschool

Table 2

Background Characteristics of Teacher Sample (N = 45)

Background Variable	f	%
Educational background		
Some college (AA)	6	13
College degree (BS,BA)	10	22
Some graduate work	9	20
Master's degree or beyond	20	44
Racial background		
African-American	23	52
Hispanic	2	5
Asian	0	0
Caucasian	19	43
Native American	0	0
Other	0	0
School		
Public	42	91
Private	4	9

on the wording of the item, some items were reverse scored, a high score indicated more developmentally appropriate practices. The range of scores possible on this section is 18-90.

Data Collection

Sixteen schools were used in this study: fourteen public schools and two private schools. The principals of these schools were asked to give the questionnaire to teachers and parents (see Appendix B). Each teacher received a packet containing one teacher's survey, (Appendix A), 15 copies of the cover letter for parents (Appendix D), and 15 copies of the parent survey (Appendix C). Teachers were asked in the cover letter to distribute the parent surveys and to return completed parent surveys and their own completed survey to their principal. Principals were asked to return the questionnaires to the researcher for tabulation and analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Data regarding goals were summarized noting the rank ordering of the three most important goals for parents and the three most important goals for teachers. Data regarding instructional methods was analyzed using a one way analysis of variance

procedure to compare perceptions of developmentally appropriate practices held by parents and teachers. Responses were also tabulated for each item in the third section of the questionnaire to determine mean scores and frequencies. One way analysis of variance procedures were conducted to discern if there were statistically significant differences in the item scores and the overall scores of parents and teachers.

Findings and Interpretations

The first objective of this study was to discern the three most important goals of school as perceived by the parents and teachers included in this sample. Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of goals indicated as most important during the kindergarten year. Many commonalties are shown between what parents and teachers want in kindergarten programs. When asked to indicate the three most important schooling goals, 60% of the teachers cited intellectual development and 55% of the parents and 56% of the teachers cited mastery of basic skills as one of the most important goals. The close agreement of these parents and teachers indicates that cognitive development and academic skills are of primary importance when compared to other developmental areas.

It was interesting to find that the parents' top three goals indicate the importance of working with the whole child. The first - mastery of basic skills, the second - self concept

and the third - independence touch all three areas of development (cognitive, social-emotional, and social-physical). The teachers' top three goals were intellectual development (cognitive development), self concept (emotional development), and mastery of basic skills (cognitive and language development). These ratings indicate that the teachers' emphasis on cognitive growth may not be the result of parental pressure as indicated in the study of Knudsen-Lindauer and Harris (as cited in Rescorla, 1991).

Table 4 shows the rank ordering of goals indicated as most important during the kindergarten year by teachers and parents. Despite some differences, the basic priorities of both parents and teachers appear to be very similar. The teachers' selection of intellectual development as the first goal, and mastery of basic skills as the third most important goal, indicates not only a strong emphasis on cognitive growth, but also an appreciation for the subtle distinction between development and practical application. In contrast, the parents' choice of mastery of basic skills as the most important goal, and intellectual development as only the fifth most important, shows a greater concern for practical application than developmental growth.

Self concept was the second most frequently cited goal by both teachers and parents. This concern for social-emotional growth shows a recognition that schools should not deal exclusively with cognitive development. Parents chose

Table 3

Teachers' and Parents' Ratings of the Three Most Important Goals of Kindergarten

Goals	Teachers (N=46) f*	%	Parents (N=148) f*	%
Personal relations	7	15	55	37
Career/vocational educational	2	4	15	10
Intellectual development	28	60	47	31
Enculturation	1	2	0	
Mastery of basic skills	26	56	82	55
Independence	14	30	56	37
Citizenship	1	2	1	.6
Creativity	10	21	32	21
Self-concept	27	58	69	46
Emotional/physical well-being	4	8	17	11
Moral and ethical character	10	21	47	31
Self-realization	3	6	19	12

* frequency noted as one of three most important goals

Table 4

Rank Order of Goals Indicated as Most Important during the Kindergarten Year by Teachers (N=46) and Parents (N=148)

Goals	Teachers	Parents
Personal relations	6	4
Career/vocational educational	9	9
Intellectual development	1	5
Enculturation	10	11
Mastery of basic skills	3	1
Independence	4	3
Citizenship	10	10
Creativity	5	6
Self-concept	2	2
Emotional/physical well-being	7	8
Moral and ethical character	5	5
Self-realization	8	7

independence as the third most important goal of kindergarten, while teachers ranked it as the fourth most important goal. This shows that both groups regard the rôle of kindergarten as an important maturational agent for children.

There was also similar agreement between teachers and parents on the least frequently cited goals. Enculturation, citizenship, and career/vocational education were cited as least important by both parents and teachers. Enculturation was not cited by any of the parents, and was ranked as least important by teachers along with citizenship. Parents and teachers differed only slightly in rankings of self-realization and emotional/physical well-being. Teachers ranked emotional/physical well-being as the seventh most important goal and self realization as the eighth most important goal. Conversely, parents identified self-realization as the seventh most important goal and emotional/physical well-being as the eighth most important goal. These low ratings by both parents and teachers indicate consistent opinion that these are not important goals in the kindergarten classroom.

This sample group's responses support other research findings that have shown increased importance placed upon skill-centered, academically oriented programming in early childhood education (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Frost & Kissinger, 1976; VanCleaf, 1979). However, the results of the data analysis differed from previous research in other respects. While some researchers have found parental expectations to exceed teacher

expectations for early skills attainment (Rescorla, 1991), this study found that teachers placed a greater value on early academic experience.

This study shows that, in terms of the goals for kindergarten, teachers emphasize areas of cognitive development; whereas, parents valued social-emotional development as well. One implication of this study is that, while teachers and parents may reach a broad consensus on the goals of schooling, there must also be a discussion of how common goals will be achieved.

The second objective of this study was to ask teachers and parents to rate the importance of instructional methods. In ratings of teaching methodology for developmental appropriateness, there were statistically significant differences between parents and teachers. Table 5 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for parents' responses. The total parents' mean score was 53.01. Table 6 shows the means and standard deviations for teacher responses. The total teachers' mean score was 58.62.

Table 7 shows the results of the one way analysis of variance conducted on individual items for developmentally appropriate teaching practices. A five point scale was used to determine parents' and teachers' perceptions of what constitutes good teaching practices. Several items used reversed scoring to reduce the likelihood of socially desirable responses. A high score indicates more developmentally appropriate practices.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Range of Scores for Developmentally Appropriate Activities as Rated by Parents (N=148)

Activities	M	S.D.	Range
Direct Instruction Teaching...			
Alphabet and phonics*	1.15	.43	1-3
Word recognition*	1.62	.90	1-5
Counting and number recognition*	1.26	.56	1-3
Simple addition and subtraction*	1.87	.99	1-5
Handwriting instruction*	1.70	1.07	1-5
Sitting and working quietly*	1.55	.76	1-5
Cutting, coloring and tracing*	1.66	.86	1-5
Child Involved in...			
using workbooks and dittos*	2.31	1.40	1-5
free play	3.76	1.03	1-5
developing language using fingerplays, songs and games	4.40	.77	3-5
using repetition and drill to help learn letters and numbers*	4.55	.76	1-5
using a variety of materials (blocks, water and clay) for learning	4.29	.96	1-5
choosing and initiating many of their own activities	4.07	.97	1-5
participating in dramatic play	3.87	1.04	1-5
writing stories using scribbling, pictures and invented spelling	4.12	1.03	1-5
How Important is it That...			
the teacher uses a report card with grades to show children are progressing*	1.97	1.32	1-5
the teacher reads a variety of books and stories to children	4.64	.59	2-5
the teacher allows children to be physically active during school	4.20	.94	1-5
Total score	53.01	7.22	35-73

* Items with reversed scoring

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations, and Rangeof Scores for Developmentally Appropriate Activities as Rated by Teachers (N=148)

Activities	M	S.D.	Range
Direct Instruction Teaching...			
Alphabet and phonics*	1.30	.70	1-3
Word recognition*	2.62	.96	1-4
Counting and number recognition*	1.24	.61	1-3
Simple addition and subtraction*	2.23	1.03	1-5
Handwriting instruction*	2.18	1.07	1-5
Sitting and working quietly*	2.66	1.29	1-5
Cutting, coloring and tracing*	1.51	.76	1-3
Child Involved In...			
using workbooks and dittos*	3.09	1.15	1-5
free play	4.09	.97	2-5
developing language using fingerplays, songs and games	4.64	.68	2-5
using repetition and drill to help learn letters and numbers*	3.64	1.26	1-5
using a variety of materials (blocks, water and clay) for learning	4.62	.68	3-5
choosing and initiating many of their own activities	4.38	.89	1-5
participating in dramatic play	4.27	.99	1-5
writing stories using scribbling, pictures and invented spelling	4.58	.75	2-5
How Important Is It That...			
the teacher uses a report card with grades to show children are progressing*	3.27	1.36	1-5
the teacher reads a variety of books and stories to children	4.84	.48	3-5
the teacher allows children to be physically active during school	4.22	.88	2-5
Total score	58.62	6.14	24-69

* Items with reversed scoring

Table 7

Results of the ANOVA Comparison of Parents and Teachers Perceptions of Important Activities in Kindergarten Programs

Activities	Parents (N=145) M	Teachers (N=37) M	F
Direct Instruction Teaching...			
Alphabet and phonics*	1.15	1.30	2.84
Word recognition*	1.62	2.62	16.10***
Counting and number recognition*	1.26	1.24	0.03
Simple addition and subtraction*	1.87	2.23	4.30**
Handwriting instruction*	1.70	2.18	6.76**
Sitting and working quietly*	1.55	2.66	49.70***
Cutting, coloring and tracing*	1.66	1.51	1.12
Child Involved In...			
using workbooks and dittos*	2.31	3.09	12.13***
free play	3.76	4.09	3.57
developing language using fingerplays, songs and games	4.40	4.64	3.56
using repetition and drill to help learn letters and numbers*	4.55	3.64	34.36***
using a variety of materials (blocks, water and clay) for learning	4.29	4.62	4.57**
choosing and initiating many of their own activities	4.07	4.38	3.62
participating in dramatic play	3.87	4.27	5.16**
writing stories using scribbling, pictures and invented spelling	4.12	4.58	7.77**
How Important Is It That...			
the teacher uses a report card with grades to show children are progressing*	1.97	3.273	2.74***
the teacher reads a variety of books and stories to children	4.64	4.84	4.24**
the teacher allows children to be physically active during school	4.20	4.22	.02
Total score	53.01	58.62	18.30***

* Items with reversed scoring
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .001$

Parents overwhelmingly scored direct instructional teaching methods as very important. The importance parents place on using repetition and drill further supports the parents' perceptions of the value of direct instruction and is consistent with their stated goal of mastery of basic skills. These findings are consistent with other studies that have found a strong correlation between level of parent education and the value parents place on early academics (Stipek, Rosenblatt & DiRocco, 1994).

Teachers scored three out of seven direct instructional methods as very important with the remaining four as only moderately important. Of equal importance to teachers was child involvement in active learning. The high scores given to developing language, using a variety of materials for learning, and writing their own stories support the teachers' goals for intellectual development.

The results of the ANOVA comparing parents' and teachers' perceptions of kindergarten activities indicate that there are statistically significant differences between parent and teacher perceptions in several areas. The greatest differences between the two groups were in areas involving traditional passive ways of learning (e.g., sitting and working quietly and for using repetition and drill). In four out of the seven direct instructional teaching methods, there were significant differences between the parents' and teachers' perceptions. Parents consistently valued direct instructional teaching methods

more than teachers. This indicates that parents may not be aware of current research on the importance of developmentally appropriate practices and are unaware of how children actually learn.

The results of the data analysis also revealed statistically significant differences between parents and teachers in their perceptions of the more active modes of learning. Teachers placed greater value than parents on the use of a variety of materials for learning, in dramatic play activities, and in the use of scribble writing and invented spelling. In fully five of the eight items relating to child-centered active learning, parents and teachers had statistically significant perceptions of what was most appropriate in kindergarten. These findings are consistent with other research findings (Stipek, Rosenblatt, and DiRocco, 1994; McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1982, as cited in Rescorla, 1991) and indicate that parents may not be aware of current research on the importance of developmentally appropriate practices.

Also of interest in this study was the finding that parents and teachers view the value of report cards quite differently. The data analysis revealed statistically significant differences in this area. The parents may value receiving feedback on their child without an awareness of the possibilities available. Teachers, on the other hand, may regard the flatness of the instrument as detrimental for providing parents with information on their child's growth. The differing perceptions in this

area graphically illustrate how educators have failed to help parents become informed and supportive teachers of their own children. In light of educators' increasing attention on authentic assessment, this statistically significant difference shows the lack of communication between these two powerful curriculum stakeholders. Given the evidence that suggest both the school and home suffer when there is a lack understanding between these two groups (VanCleaf, 1979), open communication cannot be overlooked when developing appropriate programs for young children.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that there is not a great disparity between the broad goals of parents and teachers on the role of kindergarten. The strength of this study is that it looked at both the general goals and specific methods. There are some real commonalities between parents and teachers regarding the goals of schooling. However, when a more detailed and thorough examination is done of the ways to accomplish these goals, there is evidence of pronounced differences. As parents and teachers work together, there must be a real effort on the part of teachers to educate parents about the variety of teaching methods and strategies that support learning. It is clear from this study that there is a lack of understanding between parents and teachers concerning appropriate teaching methods. If schools

are to successfully involve parents in the educational process, then developing open communication beyond general goals is necessary. It is hoped that the results of this study will help educators and parents reach deeper levels of communication and greater consensus on the goals of kindergarten in the educational process.

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APPENDICES

PERCEPTIONS OF KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS - TEACHER SURVEY

Dear Colleague,

Your school is participating in a study assessing parents' and teachers' views of what makes a good kindergarten program. The enclosed questionnaire was designed to give you an opportunity to express your views and attitudes about the importance of specific curriculum goals and strategies.

Please complete the Teachers' Survey yourself. Send copies of the Parents' Survey home with your students. Return all completed questionnaires in the attached envelope to your principal by October 15, 1993. All answers are completely confidential. A report summarizing the results of your school will be sent to you when the findings have been tabulated. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Enaj Schlak

Background Information

Highest grade completed in school:

_____ Some college (AA)
_____ College degree (BS, BA)
_____ Some graduate work
_____ Master's degree or beyond

Please check your racial identity:

_____ African-American
_____ Hispanic
_____ Asian
_____ Caucasian
_____ Native American
_____ Other

The Goals Of Schooling

Circle three (3) goals you believe are the most important during the kindergarten year.

1. **Personal relations** -- develop friendships.
2. **Career/vocational education** -- skills preparing one to be economically independent.
3. **Intellectual development** -- the development of basic thinking.
4. **Enculturation** -- to study traditions that link past society with the present one.
5. **Mastery of basic skills** -- reading, mathematics, communication, writing.
6. **Independence** -- helping children become responsible for their own needs.
7. **Citizenship** -- developing involvement in social life of this country.
8. **Creativity** -- create new things; appreciate creations of others.
9. **Self-concept** -- how the child feels about himself/herself.
10. **Emotional/physical well-being** -- control emotions; positive health/physical fitness.
11. **Moral and ethical character** -- to know the difference between right and wrong.
12. **Self-realization** -- develop efforts to become a better self.

(over)

7516 W. Adams
Forest Park, Il.
October 15, 1993

Dear Principal,

I am presently enrolled in a graduate program at National-Louis University in Evanston. This fall as part of my research thesis, I will be assessing parent and teacher perceptions on the goals of kindergarten in the African-American community. I have developed a questionnaire for both teachers and parents to complete. A sample is enclosed for your approval. I hope the teachers in your school will be able to participate. I will share the results of my findings with you once the study is complete. I am sure you will find it useful when discussing your curriculum goals with your parents and teachers.

If you have any questions concerning this research, feel free to contact either my research advisor, Dr. Paula Jorde-Bloom (708) 475-1100 ext. 2251 or me (708) 366-2931.

Sincerely,

L. Enaj Schlak

PERCEPTIONS OF KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS - PARENT SURVEY

Background Information

Parent completing questionnaire: _____ Father _____ Mother _____ Guardian

Highest grade completed in school:

_____ Grade School
_____ High School
_____ Some college (AA)
_____ College degree (BS, BA)
_____ Some graduate work
_____ Master's degree or beyond

Is this your first child attending kindergarten? _____ Yes _____ No

Has your child attended preschool? _____ Yes _____ No
If so, for how long? _____

Please check your family's racial identity:

_____ African-American
_____ Hispanic
_____ Asian
_____ Caucasian
_____ Native American
_____ Other

The Goals Of Schooling

Circle three (3) goals you believe are the most important during the kindergarten year.

1. **Personal relations** -- develop friendships.
2. **Career/vocational education** -- skills preparing one to be economically independent.
3. **Intellectual development** -- the development of basic thinking.
4. **Enculturation** -- to study traditions that link past society with the present one.
5. **Mastery of basic skills** -- reading, mathematics, communication, writing.
6. **Independence** -- helping children become responsible for their own needs.
7. **Citizenship** -- developing involvement in social life of this country.
8. **Creativity** -- create new things; appreciate creations of others.
9. **Self-concept** -- how the child feels about himself/herself.
10. **Emotional/physical well-being** -- control emotions; positive health/physical fitness.
11. **Moral and ethical character** -- to know the difference between right and wrong.
12. **Self-realization** -- develop efforts to become a better self.

(over)

7516 W. Adams
Forest Park, Il.
October 15,1993

Dear Parents,

Your opinion about what makes a good kindergarten program is important. The attached questionnaire gives you an opportunity to express your views and attitudes about what is important for you child's kindergarten program. Your answers will be completely confidential so please do not sign your name. All the responses will be summarized to assess parents' and teachers' perceptions of what makes a good kindergarten program. Please return your completed survey to your child's teacher by the end of the week.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

L. Enaj Schlak